

Special School Cohort Review

Solihull Council's response to report provided by Jane Friswell SEND Consultant Ltd. April 2025.

In 2024 Solihull Council commissioned Jane Friswell to undertake a review of the special school cohort within Solihull maintained schools. Following a detailed programme of work a report was submitted to the Council to consider the findings.

This document sets out a brief outline of the Council's response to the recommendations made within that report, and a public copy will be made available to accompany this. ([Solihull special school cohort review report 2024](#))

The Council's Education Strategic Plan will be shared during May 2025. This sets out the priority areas of developmental work across the borough for the next three years. This plan was created based upon a range of evidence and feedback from stakeholders and covers development across the whole education system, not just those aspects related to SEND.

However, it does take into account a number of the strategic recommendations made within Jane's report; underpinned by Recommendations 1, 2 & 18 which refer to improving trust and communication, co-production and a LA and special school task force designing new model of needs and provision descriptors and SEND funding.

Education Strategic Plan activities

Develop descriptions of pupils' cognitive need

During 2025 we will set up a group of Council and school staff to understand how to best ascertain functioning levels of pupils and develop descriptors of primary needs and placement types.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 12 - re-calibrating admission criteria
- Rec 17 - reviewing curriculum
- Rec 23 - using intentional approaches

Review of SISS

During 2025 we will form a stakeholder group to review the SISS operating model to ensure the school support offer is effective and meets changing needs of pupils.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 8 – enhancing SISS support
- Rec 21 – improving accountability

Undertake review of ARP offer

During 2026 we will review our ARP offer to understand how well the range of provision meets pupils' needs and what changes are required to ensure these are an effective part of the continuum of provision. We will work with stakeholders more closely to plan this project in more detail.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 11 - reviewing ARP models
- Rec 13 - specifying adapted curriculum features
- Rec 22 - identifying progress in mainstream schools

Undertake review of expected pupil cohort across mainstream, ARPs and specialist setting

During 2026 we will use the descriptions of pupils' cognitive need to also review where we believe differing pupils needs will be best served across the continuum of provision to ensure the offer within mainstream, ARPs and special schools is clear and provides the range of support pupils require. We will work with stakeholders more closely to plan this project in more detail.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 3 – improved commissioning
- Rec 9 – clarifying provision within EHCPs
- Rec 10 – auditing annual reviews
- Rec 15 – review special school designations
- Rec 16 – focus on outcomes
- Rec 20 – reviewing pupil profiles

High-Needs Top Up funding review

During 2027 we will use the review of expected pupil cohort across mainstream, ARPs and special schools to review our model for providing top-up funding to schools so they

are able to make the offer expected of them. We will work with stakeholders more closely to plan this project in more detail.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 5 – reflecting high costs
- Rec 14 – funding model overhaul

The funding required to deliver these future priority areas is subject to ratification by Cabinet in May through the Council's budget management governance processes.

Operational activities

Systems and processes will be developed from 2025 onwards but it is expected that each activity described above within the Education Strategic Plan will increase robustness and decision making when complete; resulting in an improved commissioning approach within the Council which can be well-embedded.

This will support the following from Jane's report:

- Rec 4 – evaluating commissioning
- Rec 19 – updating capacity

Future developments

The Council is grateful for the suggestions made to improve practice across the borough but acknowledges the report highlights a number of important actions to be taken forward for the benefit of schools and children and young people. The areas of highest priority have informed our planned work on this basis.

The remaining recommendations from Jane's report (Rec 6 on innovating placement offers and Rec 7 on expanding outreach programmes) may form part of developments in the future, or may be considered within other planned activity if felt to be a relevant and important part of the offer by stakeholders.

Communication

Stakeholders will be involved in different aspects of the activity outlined to ensure close co-production and collaboration.

Updates on progress to a wider audience will feature in the Education Strategic Plan termly updates to school leaders and engagement with the public.